

War Era Story Project 2012

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My Teenage View of World War II

About 4 pm on Sunday, December 7, 1941, EST, Glenn Foust, a neighbor friend, rode his bike into our barnyard, and yelled, "The Japanese, just bombed Pearl Harbor, killed a lot of people and sank some of our ships harbored there."

I asked, "Where is Pearl Harbor?"

He laughed and said, "You dummy, you always know your geography, and you didn't know that? It is the big harbor in Hawaii, I think it is near Honolulu."

There was no question as to there being a war. The American people were angry; the Japanese had deceived them, and then came on their soil and killed and destroyed. President Roosevelt, had no choice. Many of the people were upset that we were so ill prepared.

My Mother said, "I expect that Bob will be drafted right away." My oldest brother was, and served in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. My other brother, who was in College, went in the following summer. Clair was part of the 81st Airborne and entered combat on D-Day when the allies invaded France. He made five jumps into combat areas in and around France.

What did I do to aid the war effort? Not much. But here it is. With all big brother help gone, and most of the neighbor men serving, I worked. I worked for Dad, and in my free time helped out the neighbors. At 14, I was able to obtain my driver's license. Typed on the license firmly stated, "1. For farm use, 2. To run errands, and 3. Not for pleasure." With the tires on that 37 Ford, the pleasure trips often turned out, not for pleasure.

We on the farm had our own battle with a lack of help and early frosts and thawing, just harvesting the corn. Though pickers were available, we had so much rain that most of the corn had to be harvested by team and wagon, husked by hand. The horses could only pull a half wagon load out of the field. This would be unloaded and then back to the field. In fall of '41 I had to spend all of Christmas vacation from school husking corn in bottomland to get the corn out before the bottom flooded. Brother Clair, neighbor Eldon Baldwin, Dad and I worked every day for eighteen days, mostly in the rain. We changed to dry clothes at noon. None of us suffered from colds, just weariness. Mom may have had the biggest job, feeding us and drying our clothes (no dryers in those days). Mrs. Baldwin fed her son and clothed him.

In 1942, Dad bought a well-used McCormick- Deering 10-20 at a neighbor's auction. He said, "that is your tractor, George." And, for the most part, it was. I drove it after school, before school, weekends and I believe if our fields had been near the Antwerp school, I would have driven it to school. Those years, we were farming a couple hundred acres, not much by today's standards, but it required time. That year, with my new driver's license, I hauled all our soy beans from our farm to Decatur, Indiana, about 50 miles distant.

On our farm, we had about ten head of milking cows, twenty sheep, a dozen brood sows and many little pigs from time to time. Each year, we purchased about 500 chicks and kept the laying hens for eggs to market. We had a couple of cats, for mousers, and a dog we called Collie. Collie was a good healer, and a big help in bringing up the cattle from our pasture, which extended a mile from the barn.

In the fall of 1943, the weather was cold, but not rainy, this helped in harvesting all our crops. That winter, after the crops were harvested and fall planting was completed, I went to work for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Mark Center, Ohio. There were nine boys from Antwerp and five from Mark Center. We were Gandy Dancers; we worked the track. We had three adults working with us. We worked 20 hours a weekend and I made \$32.00 each week. Now, I was rich - no rent to pay, meals were free - this is a depression boy talking.

During year of 1944, farming was about same, I worked for other farmers and there were all kinds of job opportunities. I Even worked some in construction. Rollie Schuller, a neighbor, asked me to work for him in running a threshing machine. I was more of a gofer and greaser and handled on-job complaints. Fortunately, most of the farms were friends of my father and things went pretty smoothly. That summer, after crops were harvested, I went to work at International Harvester in Ft. Wayne, IN. I Drove my 1930 Model A Ford to my sisters', and rode with them to the factory. Also a passenger in that vehicle, was Neola Gordon, who had taught all my older siblings in Maumee Central, a one room school, the last in Paulding County, and which I attended for eight years. In the 44-45 school year, Neola Gordon taught me typing at Antwerp. That fall, I played six-man football at the school, and in the spring played baseball. The war was winding down, but we didn't know it.

Back to work on the Railroad, this time at Sherwood Ohio. We only worked on Saturdays, no more big pay checks. We had a surprise blizzard in the fall. Dad and I spent most of the night getting all the livestock in and closing up the barn and it was a good barn. It was an extremely cold winter, with lots of snow. No school the next day, for which I was thankful. During the war, the farmers used a lot of their equipment to keep the rural roads opened. The primary purpose was so the mail could get through. Most of the families had sons serving overseas and they wanted to know that they were alright.

There was only one rural route out of Hicksville, Ohio (Our Mailing Address). On a cold, snowy day in winter of '43-44, Mr. Long, the mailman brought the mail to the door. He had six weeks' mail from Brother Bob, who we thought was in North Africa, and he was. Mr. Long knocked, and when Mom opened the door, he said, "Mrs. Forrest, I believe this is what you have been waiting for."

In summer of '45, I worked driving tractor, a 15-30 Farmall, for Rollie Shuller. He had recently purchased a Gleaner combine. He worked from a platform and could raise and lower the cutting head. Our
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agreement was that he was to pay me 50 cents per acre. I could smell the money. Unfortunately, it rained a great deal and our harvesting was limited, so my smell of money was washed away by the rain. However we did cut a lot of wheat, oats and clover seed.

During the war years, every child, man and woman helped, including the handicapped. My kid sister helped with chores, errands and aided our Mother in household duties. After a day when she had been assigned the responsibility of keeping the chickens off the porch, the next day, she came down with Chicken Pox. She exclaimed, "I am not going to chase those chickens again!" Rebellion had taken place on the home front; Janice was only seven.

The American Giant had been awakened by the attack on Pearl Harbor. A lot of lives had been lost. London had the will to survive, then there was D Day, the invention of the Atom bomb, bombing of Major cities in Japan, surrender of Japan, surrender of Italy, surrender of the German Nazis and the war was over. Or, so I thought. However, WWII was not over, I was drafted, went to Cleveland by the Nickel Plate Railroad for a physical, and on Dec 21, 1945, was inducted into the U.S. Army. After 3 days, I enlisted for 3 years in the U.S. Army Air Force. I said that, "I went to serve so a WAC could go home."